



## My Next Steps:

# Beginning the Separation Process



### Question

**My service member is planning to separate from the military. Where do we begin?**



### Answer

Every year, thousands of service members separate from the military. This transition is not just a career change; for many, it is also a culture change. In addition to changes in income, health care and benefits, your family may also experience the loss of a familiar community and structure. This transition affects you too. Whether your service member is thinking about separating or has a set separation date, you need to understand there are resources to help you prepare and plan for this transition. By understanding the separation process for your service member, you can identify areas in which you can assist your family.

Your service member enlisted or was commissioned into his or her branch of the military and made an oath to uphold a set of duties for a defined period of time. His or her official military personnel file will indicate the date of the obligated last day on active duty. In the Army and Air Force, enlisted service members refer to this date as their expiration of term of service, or ETS, date. For Navy and Marine Corps enlisted service members, the service commitment date is referred to as the end of active duty obligated service, or EAOS. Officers and Warrant Officers fulfill an Active Duty Service Obligation, or ADSO. Once your service member fulfills this commitment, he or she may have the choice to re-enlist or continue in a commissioned career. As that ETS, EAOS, or ADSO date nears, your service member will likely be contacted by someone in the unit or command to discuss his or her future in the military. If it is time for your service member to leave active duty, the separation process will begin.

The first step in the separation process is for your service member to alert the appropriate person within the command of his or her intent to separate. Depending on your service member's rank or branch of the military, this notification may be directed toward the commander, first sergeant, unit transition coordinator or command career counselor. Next, your service member will likely contact the personnel office on your installation. This office will determine your service member's separation date, handle out-processing procedures and will ultimately process the DD Form 214, which is the document that authorizes your service member's release from active duty. After the command and the personnel office are aware of the intent to separate, your service member can schedule and begin transition assistance training.

***“Discussing your desires for your life after the military can help you know where to focus your efforts and where your family may need more information and guidance.”***

Though each branch or installation may have different policies and procedures for separation planning, your service member can begin the formal transition process 12-24 months, but no later than 365 days, before his or her preferred separation date. Participation in some transition briefs, classes and workshops is mandatory for your service

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### Resources at a Glance

Branch-Specific Transition Readiness Programs

[Army](#) — [Marine Corps](#) — [Navy](#) — [Air Force](#)

• [DoD Transition Assistance Program](#)



## Answer (cont.)

member. This time is considered official duty, which means your service member will complete training during regular working hours and will not have to take leave. However, until your service member is on transitional leave or reaches his or her last day on active duty, he or she will still be required to fulfill their military job responsibilities, unless they are given permission otherwise. You and your service member can sign up for transition-related briefs, training and classes through the transition assistance office with help from your service member's transition counselor. You can also access transition training online.

Remember, you are part of this separation process too. Here are some suggestions for ways in which you can assist in the transition process to prepare your family for life after the military.

1. **Determine your goals.** Talking to your service member about your family's needs and goals as you transition to life after military service is critical. What are your personal and professional goals for yourself and your family after transition? Where do you want to live? What do you want to do for employment? Discussing your desires for your life after the military can help you know where to focus your efforts and where your family may need more information and guidance.
2. **Make a plan.** Transition from the military is inevitable. Your service member's separation date will come, and your family will begin the next chapter of your lives. Help ease the transition by talking with your service member and, together, creating a plan that you both will work to complete. This plan should include the steps necessary to meet your goals and timelines to keep you on track. The plan may also include a checklist for the many tasks you will need to complete, such as preparing your finances for anticipated gaps in employment, prepping for a final military move, out-processing and turning in military gear, and getting health and dental exams before your insurance coverages changes. Review the MySTeP section of the MySECO website to help you identify the appropriate resources to develop and complete your plan.
3. **Start early.** Whether your service member's separation date is 6 months away or 6 years away, the amount of time you take to plan your finances, prepare for

employment, understand your benefits and plan for your health care changes will be time well spent. Programs and services, such as the installation's employment support program and personal financial readiness program, and virtual-based programs, such as Spouse Education and Career Opportunities, are available to help you while your service member is on active duty and for a limited time after separation. Familiarize yourself with these programs and offices so you can take advantage of them before separation.

4. **Be informed.** As a military family, you may have found that the military made many decisions for you. Now that transition is on the horizon, nearly every decision from where to work and where to live to where to get your health care will be your responsibility. Determine your needs and research your options. MySTeP can help you find the resources to get answers to your transition-related questions, such as how to learn about your family's eligibility for veterans' benefits and what considerations to make when deciding on health care coverage after leaving the military.
5. **Get involved.** Spouses are encouraged to be part of the separation process. You may attend the transition seminars and meetings with your service member and transition counselor. If you, your service member, or another family member is interested in going to school, starting a business, or seeking employment, MySTeP can help you target the workshops and classes in which to participate during transition training. You can also access the online TAP training offered by the Department of Defense. Your involvement can ensure you have the information needed to make the best decisions for the goals and concerns that matter most to you and your family.

As a military family, you are likely very familiar with change. Separation from the military will bring about another change. It takes time and preparation to successfully transition from the military. Determining your goals, making a plan, starting early, learning about the resources available to your family during and after transition and getting involved in the separation process can help your family successfully transition from the military.



## Steps to Consider

*These “Steps to Consider” are not meant as a checklist. Use the suggestions to facilitate a discussion with your service member.*

- Understand your service member’s service obligation. Know that promotions, additional training or education, and financial bonuses and incentives may have extended your service member’s enlistment or commission timeline. This date may be listed on your service member’s Leave and Earnings Statement. Ask your service member to log into the [MilConnect](#) website to confirm his or her earliest separation date. Be aware that extenuating circumstances, such as unsatisfactory job performance, health issues or disciplinary infractions, may result in your service member separating from the military earlier than is listed in MilConnect.
- Has your service member notified his or her command about separating from the military? If not, encourage your service member to talk to the appropriate person in his or her chain of command responsible for helping personnel begin the separation process.
- Encourage your service member to notify the personnel office on [your installation](#) of his or her intent to separate. Determine your service member’s separation date to help your family develop a timeline for your transition.
- Have a discussion with your service member about your family’s future. What are your goals and your family’s goals for life after the military?
- Develop a plan to work toward your goals and identify tasks you will need to complete as your transition date nears. Review the MySTeP section of the MySECO website to identify topics relevant to your family, and connect with the resources shared to get answers to your questions and guide your decisions.
- Learn about the transition process and training offered by your service member’s branch of the military. Review the [Army](#), [Marine Corps](#), [Navy](#) and [Air Force](#) transition websites for more information.
- Attend transition counseling and training with your service member. You can also access training online through the [Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program](#) website. Review the MySTeP video, “Military-Sponsored Transition Resources and Training” to learn more.



## Resources

- MilConnect: <https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect/>

### Installation Resources

Locate a military personnel office: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>

- In the dropdown menu, choose “I’m looking for a program or service.” Then, type in “Personnel Support Office” in the “I’m choosing from” text field. Next, you’ll be asked to filter by installation or zip code. After making your selection, select the “Search” button.

Locate a transition assistance office: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>

- In the dropdown menu, choose “I’m looking for a program or service.” Then, type in “Transition Assistance Program” in the “I’m choosing from” text field. Next, you’ll be asked to filter by installation or zip code. After making your selection, select the “Search” button.

### Branch-specific Transition Assistance Programs

- Army Transition Assistance Program (Soldier for Life, or SFL-TAP): <https://www.sfl-tap.army.mil/>, or call 800-325-4715.
- Marine Corps Transition Readiness Program: <http://www.usmc-mccs.org/index.cfm/services/career/transition-readiness/>
- Navy Transition Assistance Program: [https://www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family\\_readiness/fleet\\_and\\_family\\_support\\_program/work-and-family-life/transition\\_assistance.html](https://www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program/work-and-family-life/transition_assistance.html)
- Air Force Transition Assistance Program: <http://www.afpc.af.mil/Separation/Transition-Assistance-Program/>

### Department of Defense Resources

- DoD TAP: <https://www.dodtap.mil>



## Notes

## Related MySTeP Topics

- Separation Pay Eligibility and Considerations

- Relocation Considerations for Families Transitioning from the Military